

## Christianity and Governments

Below will be found the address delivered in New York, April 19, 1912, before the conservation congress by Hon. J. A. MacDonald, of Toronto. It produced a profound impression. Read it.

What message has Christianity for the governments of America? What can Christianity do, through this Men and Religion Forward Movement, to make government of the people, by the people and for the people a reality on this continent? What power is there in the religion of the men of this movement to vitilize and sustain American democracy, and to warrant it in aspiring to project itself over the world? How are the principles of righteousness and the power for service represented in this religious congress to be made energizing and dominant in state legislatures and in the national congress at Washington and in provincial legislatures and in the dominion parliament at Ottawa?

Questions such as these are suggested by the theme of this evening's program. Such questions must have been in the minds of the committee responsible for assigning to this theme an American political leader and a Canadian newspaperman. If that be true it is our duty to face such questions, and to make this congress face them, without mincing words and without evading issues.

I shall therefore press upon you some points which seem to be pertinent and to call for recognition.

(1) The fact of American democracy puts responsibility for American government directly and immovably on the American people. If there is evil in the land, injustice, oppression, wrongdoing, the people are responsible. There was a time when responsibility rested on the king. His was the authority and his the blame. But if we the people have dismissed the king, if we have put on the royal purple and climbed up to the throne of power, then ours the blame and ours the disgrace—ours and our children's after us. For this is the distinction of our democracy: that we have taken the sceptre of government from the hand of the king and put it into the hand of the crowd.

(2) The character of government is judged not by its forms, but by its fruits. Names and phrases and symbols do not signify. We may talk of the monarchy or of the republic. We may prate about autocracy or about democracy. That government is best which produces the best results in individual freedom, in civic efficiency, in national character. A system is judged not by its favored few, its aristocracy of privilege, but by what it does for the average man. In England there is—

or rather was, for it is passing with the steadily rising tide of British democracy—in England there is the remnant of an aristocracy of birth and of privileged position which through generations dominated English life and character. In America, both in the United States and in Canada, there is growing up an aristocracy of wealth and of the power of politics and in industry that wealth controls. Under both flags every special privilege to the few involves a special loss to the many. Class privilege on one side means danger to class rights on the other side. That danger is none the less in America because we have changed from one type of class domination to another. Our forefathers came to these United States and to Canada to escape the injustice of land laws and the exactions of landlords. I ask you if our children will inherit from us that larger personal liberty and that juster equality of opportunity which we inherited from the pioneers of this continent? If the older landed aristocracy of Britain chastised the people with whips, what have we whereof to boast if our privileged American plutocracy chastise the people with scorpions?

(3) In so far as government under our democracy has come short, that shortcoming is due not to the inadequacy of democratic institutions, but to the frailties and failures of the people, who are the government themselves. Henry Ward Beecher used to go through the country lecturing on the "Reign of the Common People." He gloried in the opportunity of America to give to the world a true interpretation of the government of the people, by the people, and for the people. He caught the Vision. He followed the Gleam. But scarce had one generation passed when from a stage wider than even Beecher commanded there arose a many-voiced cry, surging all the way from Maine to California, that the promise of equality made in the Declaration of Independence had not been fulfilled, and that Lincoln's inspiring dictum at Gettysburg had been degraded into "government of the people, by the people, for the people." On all sides the cry is raised against trusts and combines and big interests. Each party sets itself to outcries the other in the name of law and justice and the common people. But deeper than the voices of constituted authority, more determined than the slogans of political parties there rises a new, strange and alien cry, not heard in congress, ominous, threatening, ungodly, all the way from New York to Los Angeles: "A curse on both your houses! The bomb's the thing!"

But, sir, these cries of discontent, heard all over this continent, heard all over civilization, heard in Britain loud and stern as anywhere, are not only ominous, they are hopeful. The cry of the common people, upon whom the burdens of decent living press so heavily, the cry of the toilers for a fairer division of the fruits of their toil, the cry of the unemployed for a chance to make good the impulses and aspirations that disturb their narrow life, even the cry of the rebellious against what seems to them the cruel injustices of things as they are—these cries are not the death-knell of civilization; they are the birth-cries of a new democracy.

(4) But the new democracy will be no better than the old, unless there come with it a new moral standard and a new moral dynamic. Christianity can do nothing worth while for governments except to Christianize the life of the people, of all the people, in whom is the source and power of democratic rule. The curse of government in America to-

day is the inadequate morality of the people. There has come, in the free air of our broad life, a marked weakening of our sense of moral distinctions, of moral obligations and of moral retributions. We do not believe as sternly as our fathers did in the authoritative rightness of right and in the absolute wrongness of wrong. The sense of right may be strong and alert in personal affairs, but not in social and corporate relations. We do as corporations, or profit from its doing, what we would scorn to do as individuals. Times and places and purposes warp our moral judgment. Notoriously is this true today in large enterprises and in political and social duties. Government never can be just or strong or enduring so long as great areas of our life are regarded as free-and-easy moral regions "where the best is as the worst and there are no Ten Commandments." In our chambers of commerce, in our institutions of finance, in our stock exchanges, as well as in our party conventions and halls of legislation, we need to return to the elemental morality of Butler's dictum which John Morley told the University of Toronto he would write over the doorway to every university and parliament in the British empire: "Things are what they are; their consequences will be what they will be; why, then, should we deceive ourselves?"

And our quickened moral sense must be alert not only as regards

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